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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MC-02 ACDA-19 SAM-01 SAJ-01 IO-14 EUR-25

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 NIC-01 AID-20

SSO-00 SCCT-02 DRC-01 /178 W
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3778
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 5068

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IS, XF
SUBJ: CAPUCCI INDICTED: THE ISRAELI VIEW

1. SUMMARY. GREEK CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP HILARION CAPUCCI WAS INDICTED SEPT 3 FOR PERFORMING SERVICES FOR FATAH, ILLEGALLY CARRYING AND POSSESSING WEAPONS, AND MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH FOREIGN AGENT. ACCORDING PRESS, CAPUCCI FACES POSSIBLE 35-YEAR PRISON TERM IF CONVICTED. END SUMMARY.

2. CAPUCCI CASE HAS HERETOFORE BEEN UPSTAGED IN ISRAELI PRESS (AND IN MINDS OF MOST ISRAELIS) BY WHAT ARE CONSIDERED MORE PRESSING MATTERS SUCH AS UPCOMING RABIN VISIT, SEEMING RESUMPTION OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY THROUGH JORDAN, AND RUSSIAN MINESWEEPING EXCITEMENT, ALL OF WHICH HAVE SURFACED SINCE CAPUCCI WAS ARRESTED. IN PARTICULAR, THERE HAD BEEN VIRTUAL SILENCE FROM GOI OFFICIALS REGARDING DISPOSITION OF CASE. COMMENTATORS HAVE DEBATED RELATIVE MERITS OF TRIAL VS EXPULSION,
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WITH OPINION ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN FAVOR OF FORMER.

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3. OFFICIAL SILENCE WAS FINALLY BROKEN END OF LAST WEEK, IN MANNER WHICH GAVE GLIMPSE OF GOI INTENTIONS. IN PRESS INTERVIEW, MINISTER OF POLICE AND INTERIOR SHLOMO HILLEL WAS ASKED IF HE THOUGHT GOVERNMENT SHOULD INTERVENE IN HANDLING OF CASE. IN RESPONSE, HILLEL MADE IT CLEAR THAT "IN HIS OPINION" GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT INTERVENE. (COMMENT: IN ISRAELI SYSTEM CASES OF THIS KIND ARE IN HANDS OF JUDICIAL APPARATUS HEADED BY ATTORNEY-GENERAL. LATTER'S DECISION TO SEE CASE THROUGH TO TRIAL COULD BE OVERRIDDEN ONLY BY GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN FAVOR OF EXPULSION. SUCH POLITICAL INTERVENTION COULD BECOME CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE IN VIEW TRADITIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF ATTORNEY-GENERAL IN MATTERS OF LAW.)

4. HILLEL WAS ASKED IF HE THOUGHT THAT BRINGING CAPUCCI TO TRIAL WOULD LEAD TO CRITICISM IN CHRISTIAN WORLD. HE REPLIED THAT ISRAELI JUDICIAL SYSTEM HAS GOOD REPUTATION THROUGHOUT WORLD, AND THAT PUBLIC TRIAL OF PERSON ACCUSED OF OFFENSES AGAINST HUMAN LIFE COULD NOT BE CRITICIZED.

5. RESPONDING TO QUESTION CONCERNING SPECIAL TREATMENT TRADITIONALLY AFFORDED CLERICS BY GOI, HILLEL SAID HEAD OF CHURCH WOULD CONTINUE RECEIVE SPECIAL PRIVILEGES, SUCH AS RIGHT TO CROSS BORDERS OTHERWISE CLOSED. (COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, CLERICS AND UN OFFICIALS ARE ALLOWED UNIMPEDED CROSSING OF ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER.) HILLEL EXPLAINED THAT FACT THAT CAPUCCI EXPLOITED HIS PRIVILEGED STATUS SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT AFFECT NORMALLY GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND OTHER CHURCH HEADS. HE DESCRIBED DISRUPTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN GOI AND ARAB CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS PRIMARY MOTIVE BEHIND TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDUCING CAPUCCI TO WORK FOR THEM.

6. COMMENT. ISRAEL MUST BE AWARE THAT ITS HANDLING OF CAPUCCI CASE ENTAILS RISK OF CRITICISM BY SOME ELEMENTS OF WORLD CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHO WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT RANKING CHURCH OFFICIAL COULD BE IN LEAGUE WITH TERRORISTS. NEVERTHELESS, GOI HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED IT CANNOT AFFORD TO APPEAR "SOFT ON TERRORISM" TO ISRAELI PUBLIC, AND WE BELIEVE THAT GOI MUST POSSESS SUFFICIENTLY CONCRETE
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EVIDENCE TO JUSTIFY ITS COURSE OF ACTION.
KEATING

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